

THE INFLUENCE OF AMERICAN DREAM TO THE CHARACTERIZATION OF WILLY LOMAN'S IN ARTHUR MILLER'S NOVEL

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Abstract

This research aims at describing the influence of American Dream on Willy Loman's characterization as a husband, father, and a salesman. The research applied a library research to collect information about the Death of a Salesman, American Dream and the author, Arthur Miller. In doing the analysis, the writer used the structural method and sociological approach. The data were analyzed the characterization of Willy Loman by using structural approach, the writer continued her analysis to find out the influence of American Dream on Willy Loman's characterizations by using sociological approach. The result of the research shows that Willy Loman's characterizations are influenced by his ambition to pursue his American Dream. Willy Loman's dream for being successful salesman and as a father makes him disappointed after he knows that he is fired from Howard's Company and when he realizes that Biff in 34 years old does not has a proper job with a big salary. The realities make Willy Loman feels that he has failure in his life.

Keywords: Willy Loman, Characterizations, American Dream

A. Introduction

Literary works are expression of human being. They are expression of feeling, sense, experience and destination. American Dream is a novel that tells imaginative story that reflects humans life. The term "American Dream" was first used by Truslow (1931) states "The American Dream is that dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for everyone, with opportunity for each according to ability or achievement. It is a difficult dream for the European upper classes to interpret adequately, and too many of us ourselves have grown weary and mistrustful of it. It is not a dream of motor cars and high wages merely, but a dream of social order in which each man and

each woman shall be able to attain to the fullest stature of which they are innately capable, and be recognized by others for what they are, regardless of the fortuitous circumstances of birth or position." (Adams in Gillman, 2010).

"The object of the (fourteenth) amendment was undoubtedly to enforce the absolute equality of the two races before the law, but in the nature of things it could not have been intended to abolish distinction based upon color, or to enforce social, as distinguished from political equality, or a commingling of the two races upon terms unsatisfactory to either. Laws permitting, and even requiring, their separation in places where they are liable to be brought into contact do not necessarily imply the inferiority of either

race to the other, and have been generally, if not universally, recognized as within the competency of the state legislatures in the exercise of their police power. The common instance of this children, which has been held to be a valid exercise of the legislative power even by courts of states where the political rights of the colored race have been longest and most earnestly enforced.” (Brown in Cullen, 2003:105-106)

White in *The Values Divide: American Politics and Culture in Transition* expresses that “America is not a place. It is a dream” (White in Dantesman, 2005:34). Based on his statement, we can conclude that White believes that America is a place where people can achieve their dream, not only in achieving prosperity but also in getting a better life in many aspects such as education and social status.

After reading the drama, the writer found some problems as follows: (1) The failure of Willy Loman to become a good husband and father. (2) The lies which have been done by Loman in order to cover his failure. (3) The despair of Willy Loman that brings him to suicide. In order to make this writing more focus, the writer tries to make a limitation around her writing. Based on the title “The Influence of American Dream to Willy Loman's Characterization in Arthur Miller's the *Death of a Salesman*”, the writer will focus to talk about Willy Loman's characterization and the impact of American Dream in building Willy Loman's character.

The writer formulated three questions to support the research as follows: (1) What are the characterizations of Willy Loman as the main

character in *The Death of a Salesman* drama? (2) How big is the influence of American Dream on the characterization of Willy Loman? (3) Does American Dream become a factor of Willy Loman's suicide? The writer formulated three objectives in the research as follows: (1) To know the characterizations of Willy Loman as the main character in *The Death of a Salesman*; (2) To know the influence of American Dream on the characterization of Willy Loman; (3) To determine if American Dream becomes a factor of Willy Loman's suicide.

Sartiah (1986) in his writing explain about the role of parents in educating their children even when they have many problems which must be solved. She found that the way Willy Loman determines his children's future only result in suffer of his children. Moreover, Menata (2003). Found that Willy Loman is a figure who has a good responsibility for his family, ambitious, egoistic and materialistic. However, the way he has chosen to reach his expectation is wrong.

Safrianto (2008). Found that the failure faced by Loman in his life was related to his past time, present time, family, other characters, and his failure which brought him to suicide. All of them are related to Loman's ambition and responsibility to himself and his family. Husba (2009). The study aims to know the social realities of American in 20th century reflected in the drama. Through this research, the writer proved that the description of social realities of American in the drama really reflects American families who really want to achieve what they called as American Dream. The social realities which were identified by the writer in the drama

The Death of Salesman were realism and American family.

All of the previous studies that took *The Death of a Salesman* as an object for their writing become a proof that *The Death of a Salesman* is an interesting drama to be analyzed. All the writings had different aims. Especially for this writing, the writer focuses on discussion about American Dream and its influence on the character. In this case the writer takes Willy Loman, the major character of *The Death of a Salesman*, as the object to be analyzed.

1. Theme

Theme means different things for different people. There are many definitions of theme based on the aim of the person in using it. For example, theme may mean the moral or lesson that can be extracted from the work for some people who think that literature is a vehicle for teaching and propagating a favorite idea. Theme also refers to the basic issue, problem, or subject with which the work is concerned. Beside that, theme can also be mentioned as a familiar pattern or motif that almost occurs in literature (Perrine, 1974:52). Theme is a dominant idea which can be found in the drama when we are asking "what does the play mean?" There is only one dominant idea which is universal and covers all the contents of the drama. Theme is the basic idea of the play that determines the execution of the play (Reaske, 1966:18-19).

"Theme in literature, whether it takes the form of a brief and meaningful insight or a comprehensive vision of life, is the author's way of communicating and sharing ideas, perceptions,

and feelings with his readers or, as is so often the case, of probing and exploring with them the puzzling questions of human existence, most of which do not yield neat, tidy, and universally acceptable answers. Although we cannot, as critics, judge a work solely on the basis of the quality of the ideas presented (or on their degree of complexity or sophistication), it is nevertheless true that one of the marks of a great work of literature-a work that we generally regard as a "classic"-is the significance of its theme; an author's ability to construct a work whose various elements work together to yield a significant theme is an important test of the quality of the author's mind and art". (Perrine, 1974: 52-53)

In another words Brockett (1964), states that there can be more than one theme in a story, but still there is a dominant idea. By identifying the major motifs and examining how they have been embodied, we can understand and know the author's purpose and methods.

It is not an easy job to identify the theme of a play because it may involve the analysis of a number of elements and we need to understand various aspects of the work. Perrine (1974) has suggested some consideration in identifying theme: It is important in considering theme to avoid confusing it with the work's subject situation, theme does the work full justice, it is fully and completely supported by the work's other elements, the author sometime gives the work a suggestion of a particular focus or emphasis for the reader's attention, and make biographical and autobiographical exploration to know the life and personalities of the authors.

2. Character

Character is an attribute or feature that make up and distinguishes an individual. The process by which the writer makes characters seem real to the reader is called characterization. Characterization is presented through a dialogue (Reaske, 1966:40). Furthermore Brockett (1964) states that character is the material from which the plots are created. In a play, characters are developed through the speech and behavior of dramatic personage. Then, Brockett mentions 4 levels of characterization. The first one is physical level which concerns with such basic facts as sex, age, size and color. The second is the social level which includes the character's economic status, profession or trade, religion and family relationship. The third is psychological level which reveals character's habitual responses, attitudes, desires, motivations, likes and dislikes-the inner workings of the mind, both emotional and intellectual. The fourth level is moral. Moral is not always emphasized in a play. But, moral decision differentiates characters when it makes a character examines his own motives and values. Brockett adds that character is the material from which plots are created through the speech and behavior dramatic personage (Brockett, 1969: 34). James in Perrine (1974) states "What is character but the determination of incidents?" This means that behavior is a logical and necessary extension of psychology and personality.

3. Plot

A series of events and refers to the sequence of the story. Firstly is the exposition,

secondly the conflict, thirdly the climax and the finally the conclusion or resolution. Plot portrays all the main events which happen in a drama. It is also known as the structure. The most important thing in making a plot is its relationship to characters (Reaske, 1966:20).

Eller in his book *The Study of Literature* (1964:3) states as follows:

"Plot is not simply action: plot refers the arrangement of the events in the story to what the author tells first, second, third, act. The plot is plan design of the story to prepare the reader for future event in the story. In a good plot, the conclusion is a logical believable results of receding events."

Beside Reaske and Ellar, Hawthorn (1992: 94) also states about character. He divided plot into five:

1. Exposition: The stage in which the author introduces characters, scene, time and situation.
2. Rising action: It shows the dramatization for events that complicates the situation and gradually intensifies the conflict.
3. Climax: The point where the rising action come to the further development and to a moment of crisis.
4. Falling action: The stage when the problem or conflict proceeds toward resolution.
5. Solution: The last point when the problem is solved.

Cohen (1981:29) mentions that the primary demands of plot are logic and suspense. Logic is portrayed through the action which must be plausible. Then for suspense, the action portrayed contains expectations for further actions. The

core of suspense is the unpredictable ending of the story.

4. Setting

Setting is the total environment and period for the action of the literary work. It includes the time, the place, and the historical period in which the action takes places (Trisdianto, 2008:17). By determining the physical world of the play we can clarify how large the world which the playwright is concerned (Reaske, 1966:18). Trimer (1985:4) states that setting is the time, place and social reality within which a story takes places. Setting since to be insignificant element is some stories. They could take place just as well in any time or place in other stones.

B. Sociological approach

Sociology is a study of human social relationship, from the simple intimate contacts between two young people to the large, urban complexes of the modern world (Turner, 1981:1). The word of sociology was first used by Comte who believes that societies must progress through the same set of historical stages (Spencer, 1982:8). Sociology as the study of social relationship concerns to study about people who are in contact and communications with others.

Turner (1981:384) states that the process of social change is stimulated by the transformation of the economy. And the alteration in society's economy influences the change of the social and cultural fabric as well as the personality of individuals, where it can influence directly to people's motives, their internal directives, the standards that they use for

self-evaluation, and their role playing styles. People become more achievement motivated; they are guided by a desire to master and control their environment.

C. Definition of Drama

Drama employs many things to be performed. As one of arts result, it has a general. The etymology of the word drama which is taken from the Greek verb *dran* means to do or to act (Kennedy, 1991:952). According to Reaske (1966:5), drama means a literature work or a composition which presents life and human activity by presenting various action and dialogue from the actors as a theatrical presentation. Kennedy (1991) states that drama or the synonym of play means events that elicit high excitement. Again, Nathan in Kennedy, (1991) states that good drama is anything that interest and intelligently emotional group of persons assembled together in an illuminated hall.

Based on duration, drama can be divided into two: a full-length play and a short play. A "full-length play" is a play which is presented in about two to four hours. It becomes a standard which has been used since Renaissance times. A "short play" lasts about twenty minutes to an hour. A "short-play" is generally presented in some other setting, such as a lunch time theatre, a dramatic festival, a classroom, a street entertainment or a cabaret. Occasionally, plays much shorter than twenty minutes duration or much longer than four hours are presented with high artistic impact (Cohen, 1981: 24).

A form that attempts to bridge tragedy and comedy is called as tragicomedy (Cohen,

1981:26). Another kind of drama is similar in theme and approach to tragicomedy, but with the observe outcome: “comedy that ends tragically”. So, it means that dark comedy is a kind of comedy which always ends by tragedy. This kind of drama is called *Dark comedy*. (Cohen, 1981:26).

D. Research Methodology

The research used data were found by browsing internet, reading articles, journals, and books which contain the material about the topic and used structural and sociological approach. Structural approach was used to talk about the intrinsic aspects of the drama. The writer analyzed the character of Willy Loman and found out the characterization of Willy Loman in *The Death of a Salesman*. After that, the writer analyzed the characterization of Willy Loman to know the influence of American Dream on the development of Willy Loman's character by using sociological approach. In the analysis, the writer concentrates on analyzing the circumstance of Willy Loman.

In doing this research, the writer started by doing intensive reading. While reading, the writer tried to find some important texts and marked them by highlighting the text. After that, the facts in the texts were classified into some groups. Next, the writer made a narration about the facts based on her opinion and other people's opinion. Finally, the writer completed her research by making a conclusion about the topic.

Since the writer applies structural approach, which is the best approach that used in analyzing the intrinsic aspect a literary work.

The intrinsic elements that consist of the Influence, Characterization, American, Dreams, The Death of salesman as a title of a play written by Arthur Miller are the elements that are participating and supporting in forming a story in literary work. The data were analyzed the play and other source. The next step is to give the analysis based on the data.

E. Finding and Discussion

Willy Loman's characterization as the major character in *The Death of Salesman*. The discussion will be continued with an elaboration of the effects of American Dream to Willy Loman's characterizations as a father, a husband and also as an American.

Willy Loman's characterization

Willy Loman is a 63 years old man who works as a salesman for 36 years, as can be seen in Linda's speech:

Linda : When does he got the medal for that? Is this his reward – to turn around at age of sixty – three and find his sons, who he loved better than his life. (Miller, 1983:45)

Linda : A small man can be just as exhausted as a great man. He works for a company thirty-six years this March, opens up unheard-of territories to their trademark, and now in his old age they take his salary away. (Miller, 1983:44)

Although Willy Loman has become an old man, he still works as a salesman with a small commission to support his family. He lives with his wife, Linda, in a house which has been installed for twenty five years and is surrounded by apartment constructions.

Willy starts to work as a salesman after he attends the funeral party of a famous salesman

named Dave Singleman. His experience when attending the funeral has motivated him to become a salesman like Dave Singleman. He notices that Dave Singleman is appreciated by many people.

Willy : Oh yeah, my father lived many years in Alaska. He was an adventurous man. We've got quite a little streak of self-reliance in our family. I thought I'd go out with my older brother and try to locate him, and maybe settle in the North with the old man. And I was almost decided to go, when I met a salesman in the Parker House. His name was Dave Singleman. And he was eighty-four years old, and he'd drummed merchandise in thirty-one states. And old Dave, he'd go up to his room, y' understand, put on his green velvet slippers – I'll never forget – and pick up his phone and call the buyers, and without ever leaving his room, at the age of eighty-four, he made his living. And when I saw that, I realized that selling was the greatest career a man could want... (Miller, 1983:65).

But, the destiny of Willy Loman is different from the destiny of Dave Singleman. Dave Singleman is still respected in his old age, while Willy Loman is forgotten by his customers.

Working as a salesman and known as a road man makes Willy has much knowledge about the places he has visited. This can be seen when Willy explains to Biff and Happy about the places which he had visited:

Howard : Oh, I could understand that, Willy. But you're a road man, Willy, and we do a road business. We've only got a half-dozen salesman on the floor here. (Miller, 1983:62)

The dishonest affair of Willy Loman has a big effect on Willy Loman's characterization when he becomes older. It starts when Biff found

his father in a hotel room with another woman. Biff felt disappointed with his father and decided not to continue his study in University of Virginia. He also decided to start his life again without taking care of his father's dream. Biff's decision changes Willy's family life from happiness to sadness. Because of the tragedy, Willy always feels guilty to his family. It makes him depressed day by day because his hopes to make his sons success disappear.

The conversation above reveals the sensitive character of Willy Loman. He always feels that every one who looks at him will talk about his bad characters, insults him, and laughs at him. But actually, it is simply Willy's feeling when he sees the eyes who look at him. Beside that, Willy is also sensitive in replying other characters words. For example, he thinks that every word mentioned by Biff seems to insult him. He feels that Biff does not respect him anymore as a father.

Willy Loman is also described as a stubborn man who does not yearn for a change in his life. It is shown when Linda wants to give a surprise by offering him an America cheese and not Swiss cheese, the common cheese which he always consumes for his daily diet. Willy gets angry and asks for Swiss cheese.

Basically, the characterizations of Willy Loman which have been mentioned before can be grouped into two, his characters when he is still young and when he becomes older. When Willy is still young, he is a lover husband and father. He even becomes an idol for his sons. This is really different when he becomes older; Willy Loman is found as an authoritarian, sensitive,

stubborn, temperament, rude and become an imaginer.

Actually, the change of Willy's characterization is caused by two things. First, it might happen because Willy Loman become older and he cannot control his emotion anymore. Secondly, it might be happen because of the feeling that he cannot become a responsible man for his family.

The Death of a Salesman drama has a big relation with American dream because it really reflects most American desire after World War II to own a house and gain a prosperity. It is shown in some parts of *The Death of Salesman* drama, such as:

- Willy : Figure it out. Work a lifetime to pay off a house. You finally own it, and there is no body to live in it. (Miller, 1983:10)
- Ben : (*giving great weight to each word, and with a certain vicious audacity*): William, when I walked into the jungle, I was seventeen. When I walked out I was twenty- one. And, by God, I was rich! (*he goes off into darkness around the right corner of the house.*)
- Willy : ...was rich! That's just the spirit I want to imbue them [Biff and Happy] with! To walk into a jungle! I was right! I was right! I was right! (Miller, 1983:40-41)
- Biff : (*crying, broken*): Will you let me go, for Christ's sake? Will you take that pony dream and burn it before something happens? (*struggling to contain himself, he pulls away and move to the stairs.*) I'll go in the morning. Put him – put him to bed. (*Exhausted, BIFF moves up the stairs to his room*)(Miller, 1983:106)
- Happy : All right, boy. I'm gonna show you and everybody else that Willy Loman did not die in vain. He had a good dream. It's the only dream you can have – to come our number – one man.

He fought it out here, and this is where I'm gonna win it for him. (Miller, 1983:111)

- Linda : Forgive me, dear. I can't cry. I don't know what it is, but I can't cry. I don't understand it. Why did you ever do that? Help me, Willy, I can't cry. It seems to me that you're just on another trip. I keep expecting you. Willy, dear, I can't cry. Why did you do it? I search and search and I search, and I can't understand it, Willy. I made the last payment of the house today. Today, dear. And there'll be nobody home. (*a sob rises in her throat.*) We're free and clear. (*sobbing more fully released*). We're free and clear. (*sobbing more fully, released*). We're free. (*Biff comes slowly toward her.*) We're free... we're free... (Miller, 1983:112)

The quotations above truly emphasize the relation between *The Death of Salesman* with American dream. In the dialogues, the reader is given an illustration about the dream of some Americans in around 1940 to gain prosperity, reach a high social status in their community and own a house. One thing that could make Americans feel free in enjoying their life was when they have their own house (Florida, 2006). Owning a house after World War II meant that people got their real freedom. It was the same with what has been presented in *The Death of Salesman* play through Loman's character. His ambitious and expectation for owning a house is described clearly when he works for his lifetime to pay his house. Later, when his salary is not enough to pay off the house, he goes to his friend, Charlie, to borrow money. Loman spends twenty five years to finish the payment of the house until he finally owns it. When we look at the long time and his efforts to settle the

payment, he realizes that the house is an expensive thing and it can be considered as a very valuable thing after World War II.

Another dream of Americans after World War II was to reach high social status (Brockett, 1964). Social status determines one's position in the community. The way someone reach the high status in community determines how other people respect him/her. In this case, the social status of Americans could be seen mostly from their prosperity. If one American has gained prosperity, it means that they has gained a successful life, as an American or as a part of a family.

The effort of Loman to reach high social status can be seen when he really wants to be a rich man. Willy believes that the respect from other people can be bought by using money. So, Willy feels that when he becomes a rich man one day, everybody will respect him and his family. It is proved from his characterization when he is noted as a materialistic man. Furthermore, when Willy Loman becomes older and he cannot make up his family life, he expects that his sons can help him to pursue his dream to be a rich man. But, when he knows that Biff only becomes a farm labor, Willy felt so disappointed. He thought that all his hopes disappear. This situation really influences the change of Willy's characterization. Willy becomes depressed, temperamental, rude and authoritarian. Whether he realizes or not, most of his characterizations when he get older are caused by his disappointment when he could not make up his dream to get a high social status in his community.

Based on the analysis, the influence of American Dream could be seen reflected on Willy Loman's life. All of them were explained very detail and clear through the dialogues of all of the characters in *The Death of a Salesman*, especially Willy Loman.

F. Conclusion

Willy Loman in *The Death of a Salesman* appears as a 63 years old man who works as a salesman. He is a romantic husband and lover, and is idolized by his son. Being a salesman and is known as a road man makes him feel lonely sometimes. It forces him to make affair with another woman. And the affair becomes a mistake for Willy Loman in his whole life after Biff knows about it. Consequently, Willy Loman is always haunted by his mistake in the past and he always felt guilty to his family. He becomes authoritarian, sensitive, stubborn, temperamental, rude, materialistic. He likes dreaming until he is considered by people around him as a crazy man.

The change of Willy Loman's characterization starts when Biff knows about his father's affair with another woman. At the time, Biff decides not to continue his study and forget his father's dream to see him become a student in University of Virginia. When Biff decides not to continue his study, Willy feels that his dream disappears and he feels so disappointed. So, it can be said that American Dream of Willy Loman has a big influence in building his characterization.

The Death of a Salesman shows what can happen when the dream is false or unfulfilled. In the analysis, the writer found that all of Willy

Loman's characterization is built from his believe to American Dream. The way he builds up his characterization is equal with the way he tries to pursue his dream to be a rich man and get a high social status in his community. Finally, the writer found that Willy Loman only makes his family and himself suffer because of the dream that he cannot be reached as cause of Willy Loman's suicide.

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